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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: ANTI-TERROR EFFORTS, PALESTINIAN
GOVERNANCE, AND IRAQ

¶1. SUMMARY: Omani dailies cover the Ambassador's presentation of credentials, look positively at the International Religious Freedom Report, and accord major coverage to the unfolding controversy regarding the Pope's comments on Islam. State daily "Oman" stresses the importance of mutual understanding I confronting terrorism. "Oman" and private daily "Al-Watan" express hope that a Palestinian unity government can help revive the Peace Process. "Oman" calls Iraq "imprisoned under foreign occupation," comparing U.S. administration there to Britain's early 20th-century Iraq policy. END SUMMARY.

COVERAGE

¶2. On Monday, September 18, all Omani dailies front-paged Ambassador Gary A. Grappo's presentation of credentials to Sultan Qaboos; some ran large color pictures of the event on their inside pages. All dailies also ran an Oman News Agency (ONA) article on this year's International Religious Freedom report on Oman, to which coverage the three English-language papers added several verbatim excerpts from the IRF report. The English-language Oman Tribune's (circulation 8,000) headlined its story "U.S. Hails Sultanate's Religious Tolerance." Omani dailies also prominently carried news agency reports of all aspects of the controversy surrounding the Pope's remarks on Islam.

BLOCK QUOTES: MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING VITAL

¶3. In its September 17 editorial, Arabic government-owned daily "Oman" (circulation 38,000) said that "Caution and Cooperation to Face Terrorism is More than a Must":
"With the passing of the fifth anniversary of the September 11 terrorist events...it seems that the world is facing real risks that have started to manifest themselves, whether through Al Qaida's repeated threats or the growing number of terrorist operations by anonymous parties. The world does not need disputes, arguments and accusations not based on deep thinking and logic, especially not disputes between Islam and Christianity, with followers of those faiths forming two-thirds of the world population. In light of these ongoing disputes, Al Qaida's increasing threats are counterproductive for Islam and Muslims...[the Pope's recent speech relating Islam and violence] might be exploited by extremists from both sides to fuel more disputes and troubles in a world that yearns for tranquility and stability. In fact, mutual respect and

understanding between the three divine religions (Islam, Christianity and Judaism) is vital to the peace and stability of today's world... Scholars and specialists from the three religions must cooperate closely to achieve the best possible understanding between their religions, which are all seeking to make humans happy.

On the other hand, it is not a coincidence that [the Middle East region] has witnessed more than one terrorist attempt in many of its countries during the past few days... These attempts were thwarted, but these sorts of disturbances will not be the last of their kind, particularly given the threats of Ayman Al Zawahri, Al Qaida's second-in-command... With the increasing need of all the countries of the region to be cautious, it is important and necessary for these countries to achieve the greatest possible cooperation and coordination between themselves to contain the new terrorist wave that targets the people and countries of the area.

PALESTINIAN UNITY MORE THAN NECESSARY

14. Another columnist for "Oman" wrote on September 15 that "Palestinian Unity Government More than A Necessity Now": "The recently announced agreement...for the formation of a Palestinian unity government has been widely welcomed in Palestinian and Arab circles, as well as by many of those who are interested in developments in this vital area of the world. However, the agreement on a unity government is, by itself, insufficient. The most important issue for the parties is to agree on the foundations on which the new government depends, the atmosphere in which it moves, and its scope at the domestic, regional, and international levels to activate the Peace Process, removing any Israeli excuses to procrastinate or blame the Palestinian side. With the nature of current events in the region, and the high level of Arab support in the United Nations...the Palestinian stance in general, and the Palestinian government's stance in particular, can be used to address public opinion or pave the way for reactivating the Peace Process...It would be useful for the Palestinians to prevent Israel

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and any other parties from trying to hinder this process. The Palestinians' circumstances depend to a great extent on [Fatah and Hamas's] ability to work together to serve the whole Palestinian people in the present time and future."

UNITY GOVERNMENT IS PALESTINIANS' "SAFETY VALVE"

15. On September 13, "Al-Watan" (privately owned daily, circulation 42,000) wrote that "The National Unity Government is the Rescue Team for the Palestinian People":

"It has become very clear that the main cause of the Palestinian people's suffering is the policy of the international community. The solution of this problem will come only through negotiation with this community, which includes the United States. This makes it vital that Hamas be accountable before the Palestinian people and face the facts as they are instead of propagating doubts and exporting fear... It is also hoped that the formation of the new government in the forthcoming days will help the Palestinian people to return to normal life ... and establish an independent Palestinian state, with Al Quds (Jerusalem) as its capital... The Palestinian people, despite all their factions, are urged to despise all violence and anarchy, and instead to strengthen the language of national dialogue instead of resorting to weapons. They are asked to prepare a unified political plan to address the international public opinion, instead of trading accusations. All parties are now requested to combine their efforts to achieve the utmost possible degree of agreement in all aspects."

IRAQ "IMPRISONED UNDER FOREIGN OCCUPATION"

16. On September 12, "Oman" looked at Iraq "From the Moguls to the Americans - Iraq Fights Division": "Iraq has witnessed many different eras over its long history, between grandeur and weakness. However, its era as an Islamic state was the brightest in the Arab and Islamic region. By the time the Abbasid state ended in 1258, after more than five golden centuries, Iraqis had triumphed in many battles to defend their identity and

integrity.... The British occupied Iraq with the politics of intimidation and sectarianism, playing tribes off each other... The divide-and-rule policy employed by the British might have succeeded had not the Iraqis quickly discovered the deception of the British when they formed an occupation administration in Baghdad - similar to Bremer's administration - to legislate on their behalf... Today is similar to that day. Iraq has [again] been chosen to remain imprisoned under foreign occupation and some Iraqis have [again] approached the occupier to help them achieve more benefits and interests...

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